



**BEST  
PRACTICES**  
from 1,000+  
**Hybrid Events**

A Special AV Guide from the Frontlines



# Table of Contents

- 3 Welcome to the New Era for Live Events
- 4 Hybrid Events are Full of Surprises
- 6 Additional Planning Required
- 8 The Top 25+ Planning Questions
- 10 How to Create an Experience
- 12 Dazzle Attendees
- 14 What's Next
- 15 The EPN Network



# Welcome to the New Era for Live Events!

The global pandemic has changed everything, including how we communicate and interact with our stakeholders.

Hybrid events exemplify how you can bring your customers, clients and members closer from afar.

Reaching a live audience and a virtual one isn't new, but it has been reinvented and expanded since March 2020.

EPN, a network of premier AV companies located throughout North America, has delivered its first 1,000 hybrid events. These events have occurred domestically and internationally—some crossing one time zone and others more than six. Some were small events, while others were mega-big.

EPN knows what hybrid events really mean, what planning is required, how to ramp up engagement and what really works.

And this guide shares that knowledge from the frontlines with you.



# Hybrid Events are Full of Surprises

The pandemic didn't create hybrid events—but it made them more valuable.

From the frontlines, here's what works best:

## **MORE PLANNING**

Today's hybrid events are more robust, more complex and more involved. In effect, they are two events that happen at the same time—one is an in-person audience, and one is remote. The planning phase has increased by 30% to 50%. New talent such as virtual stage managers, virtual producers and greenroom technicians will be part of the event.

## **MORE SIMULATION**

The amount of pre-recorded content has soared since the re-invention of the hybrid event. Pre-recorded material reduces the chance of a blank screen during the production, creating a seamless, integrated delivery to all your audiences. Pre-recorded sessions can be leveraged throughout the event, even up to 100% simulated—or 90% simulated with a live Q-and-A session at the end featuring your CEO.

## **MORE ENGAGEMENT**

Creating a true, two-way experience via chat, polling or on-video camera has enabled unique engagement opportunities for the remote audience. Gamification has become a go-to when it comes to generating more involvement from attendees whose attention may be fading. (Fill the lower-third of your screen with QR codes and hashtags to trigger engagement.)



### **SHORTER PRESENTATIONS**

Cap presentations to 45 minutes or less. Strategically placed breaks and lighthearted or video content during the brief intermissions help keep remote attendees more engaged.

### **MORE INVESTMENT**

The attention spent on the remote audience has been heightened in recent months. And that means pre-production costs can double because the tech support required has nearly doubled and their roles have expanded. Your budget must bring together four primary components seamlessly: the in-person speaker, the remote speaker, the in-person audience and the remote audience.

### **BETTER HEADLINERS**

Meeting planners and event organizers can save up to 50% on talent by leveraging technology, booking speakers for two hours remotely as opposed to two days live. You can reallocate the savings or upgrade your keynote. (Pre-recording your speaker and streaming it during the live event is another option.)

### **BIGGER OUTCOMES**

Hybrid events can result in an audience that's 40% to 70% larger than pre-pandemic live events. It's critical to make the remote audience feel like they are a part of your live meeting. Two masters of ceremony, one for the live audience and another for the remote attendees, can create a more memorable experience.



# Additional Planning Required

Here's the short story: More complexity means more planning...sooner rather than later.

## **MORE MOVING PARTS**

The amount of planning and strategy leading up to a hybrid event has become an event in itself. The new heightened expectations for the remote audience coupled with existing demands from a live audience has extended the planning cycle. For internal events, the planning is beginning about two months earlier, where external events have added four months to the process.

## **LONGER TERM RELATIONSHIPS**

Because pre-production can cost 30% of the total bill, hybrid events have gotten pricier. In some cases, meeting planners and event organizers are striking long-term deals with partner AV companies to receive a lower unit cost per event to make the hybrid events fit their budget.



Photo Courtesy of Cory's Audio Visual



**EMMY TIGERT**  
FIRST SERVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### **MORE UNIQUE CONTENT**

The shift to hybrid events that make the remote audience feel included has created a much larger demand for all types and forms of content. Treat the online audience like the live audience with two-way communication opportunities. Offer sponsorship packages, including pre-designed graphic treatments, which turn once-awkward transitions between speakers for the online audience into new revenue for your clients. Allow your online audience to experience the live event destination by incorporating interactive videos such as wine tasting or culinary tips from the host city.

### **MORE INTERMISSIONS**

While remote audience members have received a lot of attention during the latest phase of hybrid events, there has been one concession made for in-person attendees. More breaks scheduled between shorter, more concise content work when it comes to retaining attention. As a result, scheduling more intermissions has become an important part of the planning phase.



# The Top 25+ Key Planning Questions

Based on EPN's recent experience creating best practices around the continent, here are more than 25 key AV questions that meeting planners and event organizers need to ask when initiating a hybrid event plan with their AV partner:

## SCOPE / BUDGET OF EVENT

1. What are the goals/desired outcomes of the hybrid event?
2. What is the scope/budget for the event?
3. What hybrid features will the planner's budget allow for, as examples:
  - a. Limited to simple live streaming of presentations?
  - b. Can video content be developed and incorporated?
  - c. Can pre-recorded content be done (speakers, acceptance remarks, President remarks, etc.)?
  - d. For live streaming, will there be a stationary camera or can multiple cameras with multiple angles or robotics be utilized?
4. Can sponsors be incorporated into the program to drive revenue and cover the additional costs?

## AUDIENCE

1. Who and where is the audience?
2. Number of total attendees?
3. What is the anticipated percentage of virtual vs. in-person attendees?
4. Is there a pre-determined platform that the virtual audience will use?

5. How are the virtual and in-person audiences interacting with each other?
6. How is the virtual audience interacting with the presenters?
7. How are in-person attendees interacting with the presenters?
8. Is there an in-person registration platform? Can it be connected to virtual platforms?

## PRESENTERS

1. Where are the presenters? How many presenters are participating in the event?
2. How many are presenting in-person and how many are presenting virtually?
3. Are any keynotes or presenters expecting a pre-recording option?
4. What technology will the virtual presenters use?
  - a. Are the virtual presenters tech savvy?
  - b. Do they have technical support, or will they need the support of the AV company?
5. Will exhibitors/sponsors conduct presentations?

## REHEARSAL TIME

1. Can the presenters and emcee be booked for significantly more rehearsal time than on previous events?
2. Can virtual presenters be booked in advance of show-day arrival for connection testing well before their presenting time?
3. Are the show organizers and key executives, emcees or leaders prepared to be involved in advance rehearsals?





## RUN OF SHOW

1. How does the run of show flow?
  - a. How many presenters/sessions have been scheduled?
  - b. How many pre-recorded sessions are there versus live speakers?
  - c. How much time is there between sessions, including buffers for virtual transitions?
  - d. What is the duration of each session (consider shorter sessions)?
  - e. How many breakouts are scheduled? How many concurrent breakout tracks are there?
2. Have time zones been factored into the run of show for the remote audience?

## CONTENT

1. How will your content differ for each viewer?
2. How much content can be pre-recorded?
3. What does the remote viewer need to see that the person in the room sees?
4. What video content can be incorporated?

## ENGAGEMENT

1. How do you want to engage each audience member?
2. How can remote audiences be engaged during in-person event breaks?

## DELIVERY

1. Who are the announcers talking to? Are your emcees savvy about engaging with and directing remarks to both audiences?
2. Will your AV team be contracted to “call the show”—both virtually and in-person? This position is more relevant now than ever before as seamless transitions are integral to a good remote experience.
3. Do you have contingency plans for day-of challenges such as those that may arise with technology, presenters, etc.?
4. Do you have ample staff available to support your virtual audience (connectivity, engagement)?

## PLATFORM

1. What platform should be used based on desired outcomes?
2. Does the platform need to accommodate registration, exhibitors or sponsors?
3. What is the level of virtual audience interactivity needed through the platform?



# How To Create An Experience

In the next-normal era of hybrid events, meeting planners and event organizers face a tall challenge to capture the shrinking attention spans of their audience—no matter where they physically are.

To turn this challenge into an opportunity, a shift in mindset is required. Imagine that the event isn't solely about the talking points or the slides. Think of hybrid events as a platform that can transform others through a shared experience.

## CONTEXT, POINTS OF REFERENCE

To keep online attendees engaged, remote participants must be given context and points of reference throughout the event. Pointing a video camera at a stage and letting it run doesn't make the cut post-pandemic. Add three elements to your next hybrid event: 1) Post a "Welcome" slide and a countdown clock so online attendees know that the event is happening and when they can expect it to begin, 2) Use the lower-third of the screen for event information, the speaker's name and affiliation as well as other important tidbits, and 3) Leverage special transitional content that is shown only to online users when the live speaker and audience take a break or move to a different presentation. This content could look like another countdown clock or a commercial from the host organization or a slideshow for a smooth, seamless feeling.



### **ADVOCACY FOR REMOTE AUDIENCE**

To increase engagement, the remote audience should receive some form of advocacy during the experience, so they feel part of the experience. Maybe they are given an online host. Perhaps it's a snapshot of the online attendees flashed on the big screen for the live audience. Can you imagine having the company's chief executive briefly join the online audience and giving them a preview about what he's going to talk about before he goes up on stage?

### **KNOCKOUT BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

Small breakout rooms have become a trade secret for generating more engagement at hybrid events. When audience viewers—remote or live—are permitted to go into a breakout session, they can chat directly with the keynote speakers. This value-added experience allows them to score “face time” with other influencers in the industry. Another tactic is delivering different tracks of breakout sessions for live and remote audience members to make them feel special.

### **INTEGRATING VIRTUAL WITH LIVE**

Hybrid events are doing more than speaking directly to in-person and remote audiences these days. And the new features can bring in new revenue for organizations. A hybrid event allows you to sell VIP Experience tickets at a premium price, compared to general admission tickets. As a result, the special ticket holders find themselves on a screen behind the presenter, who's on stage, so the in-person audience can watch them as well as the influencer. And when one of the VIPs gets emotional or has a facial reaction, your AV team can bring that person “full screen.”



# Dazzle Attendees

Without the right expertise, hybrid events can look like a two-ring circus.

But when they work, they will become a dazzling, seamless show worth remembering.

Now that the stakes have been raised, meeting planners and event organizers must find an experienced AV company with the appropriate talent to tell their leadership's story to the growing masses.

## **MORE PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT**

Today's hybrid events include more remote participants from speakers to attendees. Because there are more moving parts from afar, there is a greater need for more rehearsal time. In fact, rehearsal time has doubled in most cases. The ratio of rehearsal time to performance time has moved from 1:1 to 2:1. With hybrid events, gone are the days of showing up to a meeting room 10 minutes before your presentation, throwing the AV technician a USB key and jumping up on stage.

## **A STAR IS BORN**

Pre-recorded content is the star of the new era of hybrid events. It can prevent gaffes and present a seamless, polished experience, while dramatically reducing unexpected consequences from moving parts. Meeting planners and event organizers can use pre-recorded conferences as their live events. Filming the content on camera before the event is supposed to go "live" enables

the firm to secure top-notch keynote speakers for their association clients, even when the speaker is booked for the day of the event. While the pre-recorded events can end with a live Q-and-A session from the organization's leader or speaker, it can also be done beforehand and played as "live."



### LIGHTS, CAMERA, PLAY

Creating a true, two-way experience via chat, polling or on-video camera has enabled unique engagement opportunities for the remote audience. Gamification has become a go-to when it comes to generating more involvement from these attention-shrinking attendees. For example, an online host will remind remote attendees about how they can win points by sharing on-screen codes throughout an event. A few minutes later, a code or hashtag pops up on the lower-third of the screen, where you would typically find a speaker's name and title.

### SURPRISE ME

Imagine you are attending a hybrid event as an online guest. The headliner is a famous rock band, which is about to take the stage and start jamming. And moments before, the lead singer joins the online audience along with you. Hybrid events continue to create new opportunities and new experiences. And part of the magic comes from real-time surprises. Solicit user-generated content from attendees' cell phones and put it on the big screen for the live audience, which connects both groups, turning "transitional" content shown during brief intermissions into fun, light-hearted content that puts unexpected smiles on the faces of attendees.

### THE MORE, THE MERRIER

To make the audience at home feel just as special as the ones in the room, add a separate master of ceremony who talks to the remote attendees, giving them an extra element to keep them engaged. While the attendees at home watch the presenter in the room, this knowledgeable, friendly person gets results by working the chat. The focus of the content must be just as much on the remote audience—if not more—than it is for the in-person audience.



# What's Next

We are living through a sea-change moment in the live events industry.

As connectivity and communications networks improve, the fuzzy, grainy and frequently dropped WiFi signals for Zoom participants will become like rabbit-ear antennae and black & white TVs.

The power to communicate in large groups of people using cameras and microphones in our pockets and attached to our wrists will accelerate. Kids today will likely not have the same necessity to get on a plane and sleep in a hotel to experience the benefits of a special event, meeting or conference. They already expect to experience the world through their portable devices. Social media engagement will morph into the most important manner of how we interact with the world. These trends will continue.

Like the internet, which has had an immense impact on how society functions, the ability for one's voice to be heard within the right time and place for audiences of all types will be the next phase of hybrid events.

EPN will continue to work at the intersection of what's next, leveraging new technologies to deliver an experience that will change not only what people think—but how they feel.





# EPN Members

eventproductionnetwork.org

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